

Green Country Veteran

A JACK C. MONTGOMERY VA MEDICAL CENTER MAGAZINE

ISSUE 09 | SPRING 2015

**Entertainment, Education
Now On Demand for
JCMVAMC Inpatients
Page 4**

**Track Your VA
Prescriptions Online!
Page 5**

**13 Smoking Cessation Tips
Page 6**

**Cover Story:
Muskogee's Haven
House Offers Home
Away From Home
Page 12**

**"A Very Good Life"
Muskogee Veteran
Recalls WWII Service
Page 16**

**Combat Patches Needed
for Military Display
Page 23**

And Much More!



VA
HEALTH
CARE | Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

Green Country
Veteran is the
official magazine for
Veterans who receive
their care through the
Jack C. Montgomery
VA Medical Center.



On the cover: Female relatives of hospitalized Veterans can stay for free at Haven House, a four-bedroom home in Muskogee. On page 12, read how Haven House helped Diane Martin (center) support her husband, Ed, during his rehabilitation at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center.

Green Country Veteran

Director James Floyd, MHA, FACHE

Associate Director Richard Crockett, MBA

Chief of Staff Thomas Schneider, D.O., FACOI

Associate Director for Patient Care Services Bonnie Pierce, MSN, RN, CENP

Managing Editor Nita McClellan

Editor, Writer & Photographer Nathan Schaeffer

Graphic Designer & Photographer Christopher Beshears

Contents

Entertainment, Education Now On Demand for Inpatients..... 4

Veterans Can Now Track Their Prescriptions Online 5

Navy Veteran Thankful for VA Cancer Treatment 8

JCMVAMC Oncology Program..... 9

Germ Zapping Success.....10

Haven House Offers Home Away From Home 12

Need to Lose a Few Pounds? 15

"A Very Good Life" 16

"Heart Strings" Concert Series to Continue in 2015..... 18

JCMVAMC Hosts First Tribal Relations Workshop 21

Combat Patches Sought for Military Display .. 22

This publication is funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs and is an authorized publication for employees and Veterans seen at JCMVAMC. Contents of this magazine are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the United States Government or the Department of Veterans Affairs. Green Country Veteran is produced by the Jack C. Montgomery VAMC Public Affairs Office and Medical Media Department.

Please contact Nita McClellan at benita.mcclellan@va.gov or call 918-577-3704 or Nathan Schaeffer at nathan.schaeffer@va.gov if you have comments, suggestions, ideas or questions. Your feedback is always appreciated. All submissions are subject to editing and will not be returned to sender.



Jack C. Montgomery
VETERANS AFFAIRS
MEDICAL CENTER

"Excellence Starts Here"

1011 Honor Heights Dr
Muskogee, Oklahoma 74401
Phone: 918-577-3000
Toll Free: 1-888-397-8387
www.muskogee.va.gov



VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM

What is the Veterans Choice Program?

The Veterans Choice Program is a new temporary program to improve Veterans' access to health care by allowing certain Veterans to elect to receive health care from eligible providers outside of VA. The program was established by section 101 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Choice Act).

Who is eligible for the program?

A Veteran must have been **enrolled in VA health care** on or before August 1, 2014, or be eligible to enroll as a combat Veteran. Additionally, a Veteran must also meet at least one of the following criteria:

- The Veteran is told by his/her local VA medical facility that he/she will need to wait more than **30 days** for an appointment from the date clinically determined by his/her physician or, if no such date is provided, the Veteran's preferred date.
- The Veteran's residence is more than **40 miles** driving distance from the closest VA medical facility.
- The Veteran resides in a location, other than Guam, American Samoa, or the Republic of the Philippines, that is 40 miles or less from a VA medical facility and the Veteran needs to travel by **air, boat, or ferry** to reach that VA medical facility.
- The Veteran resides in a location, other than Guam, American Samoa, or the Republic of the Philippines, that is 40 miles or less from a VA medical facility and faces an unusual or **excessive burden in traveling** to a VA medical facility based on the presence of a body of water (including moving water and still water) or a geologic formation that cannot be crossed by road.
- The Veteran resides in a State or a United States Territory without a full-service VA medical facility that provides hospital care, emergency services and surgical care having a surgical complexity of standard, and resides more than 20 miles from such a VA facility. **NOTE:** This criterion applies to Veterans residing in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Also note that some Veterans in New Hampshire reside within 20 miles of White River Junction VAMC.

How do Veterans get care authorized and make an appointment?

Veterans must call the Choice Program Call Center at **866-606-8198** to verify eligibility and set up an appointment.

What is the Veterans Choice Card?

VA mailed all enrolled Veterans a Veterans Choice Card and information about the Choice Program. The Choice Card doesn't replace the identification card Veterans already use to access other VA benefits. If a Veteran is satisfied and wishes to continue with his/her current VA care, there is nothing they need to do at this time. Veterans should save their Choice Cards in case they would like to use the Program in the future. If a Veteran can't find his/her Choice Card, he/she can still call the Choice Program Call Center at 866-606-8198 for information.

What is the new expanded eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program?

VA expanded eligibility for the Choice Program by changing the method used to measure the distance between a Veteran's residence and the nearest VA medical facility from a straight line distance to driving distance. Accordingly, Veterans who live more than 40 miles driving distance from the nearest facility are now eligible for the Program. Driving distance will also be used to determine eligibility under the other residence criteria, described above.

Who can help Veterans with questions I can't answer? Warm handoff to:

Veterans can visit www.va.gov/opa/choiceact for more information.

ENTERTAINMENT, EDUCATION NOW ON DEMAND FOR INPATIENTS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY NATHAN SCHAEFFER, PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST

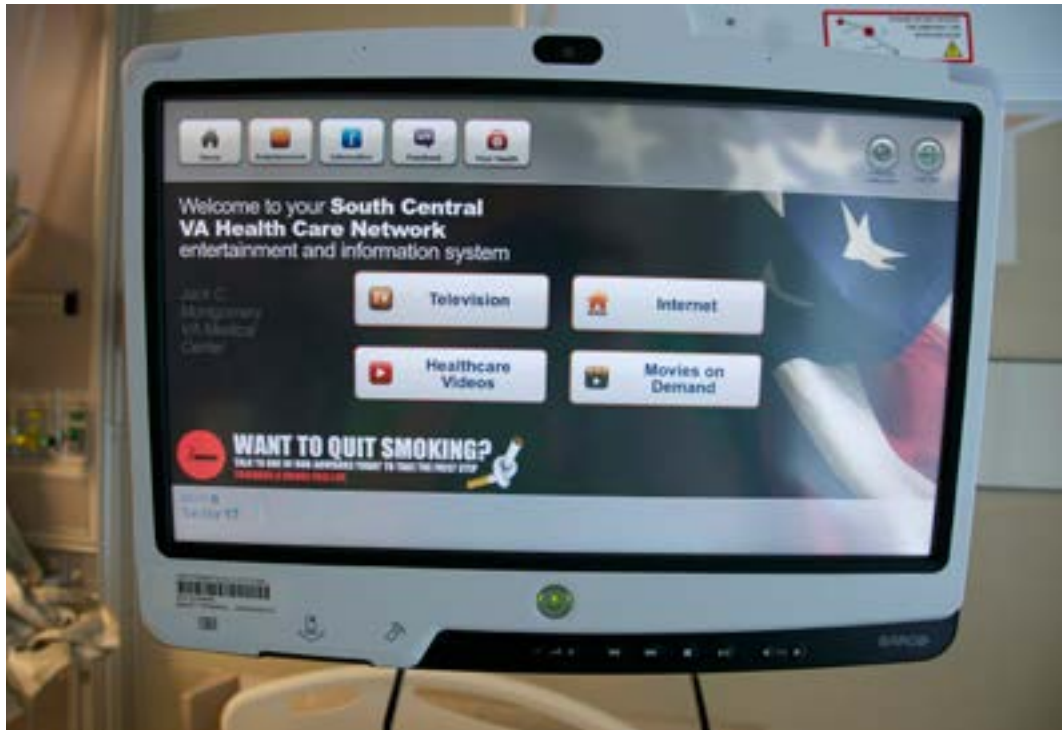
In the past, Veterans who have stayed at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center in a double room have had to share a single television with another patient. Those days are now over.

In January 2015, Insight Enterprises, Inc. installed new Interactive Patient Care Systems in all patient rooms called the “Voice of the Veteran.”

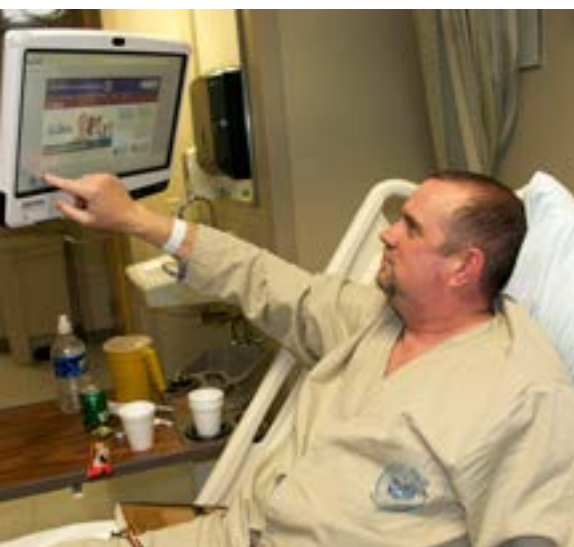
Each patient bed in double rooms now has an 18.5” touchscreen monitor, while single rooms have a 32” LCD screen at the foot of the bed and wireless keyboard.

However, Veterans can do much more than just watch television with the new system. They can also watch newly released movies, browse the internet, check email, play games or watch health videos and read health articles.

Linda Miller, Associate Chief of Nursing Inpatient Services, said the new interactive systems are very popular with Veterans.



“Voice of the Veteran” touchscreen monitor



Air Force Veteran Kevin Steele uses the new Interactive Patient Care System.

“We have received a lot of positive feedback so far,” she said.

“I have visited with several Veterans and they love the fact that the TV is right there. They have their own and they don’t have to share. They have earbuds, so it doesn’t distract the other patients who are trying to rest.”

During his inpatient stay, Air Force Veteran Kevin Steele said he liked the movie selection and the ability to surf the web.

“The internet access is good,” he said. “I’ve been checking my Hotmail. I’ve watched YouTube. My next project is a book. I’ve been doing research on it and sending myself links through email. The internet works great.”

In the near future, additional features

will be added to the system that will give patients the ability to give instantaneous feedback about their care or pain, cleanliness of the room, and also select food items for each meal.

Another upcoming feature will allow nursing staff to assign individualized education for patients. Once completed, the education will automatically be recorded in the patient’s chart.

“We’ll be able to supply specific education for their care,” said Miller. “They can accept that education and review it or they can decline it. The nurse won’t have to manually document the patient’s education. So that is going to be a huge time saver for nursing staff.” ★

VETERANS CAN NOW TRACK THEIR PRESCRIPTIONS ONLINE

BY JOAN MCWILLIAMS, MY HEALTHEVET COORDINATOR



In the last three months of 2014, Veterans who received their health care through the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center ordered more than 35,000 prescription refills through My HealtheVet, VA's award-winning, online personal health record.

Refill orders are submitted to the Consolidated Mail Out Pharmacy Program, or CMOP, and mailed directly to the Veteran's home. This convenience has made prescription refilling one of the most popular features of My HealtheVet and one of the top reasons cited by Veterans for signing up for the program.

But, what happens when a package doesn't arrive when expected?

Up until now, that meant a phone call to the local VA pharmacy or the Veteran's Primary Care team to track down the order and the package. Now, Veterans can track those packages through their My HealtheVet account, all from the comfort of their own home!

This idea was submitted by Kenneth Siehr, National Director, VA Consolidated Mail Out Pharmacy Program, to the President's 2013 SAVE (Securing America's Value and Efficiency) award program and became the winning submission for that year.

Using the new feature is simple and straightforward. The first step is for the user to log into their My HealtheVet account.

Under the Pharmacy tab, the user clicks on the "Refill My Prescriptions" or "Prescription Refill History" option. For any prescriptions refilled within the last 45 days, there will be a red "Track Delivery" delivery button.

Clicking on this button takes the user to the USPS or other delivery agency website and allows the Veteran to see when the package was mailed out, where it is now, and when it should be expected. Initial reports indicate that this feature is reducing phone calls nationwide by as many as 4,000 per week.

My HealtheVet always strives to remain at the forefront of technology and is looking forward to adding many new features in the coming months, including mobile applications.

If you are a Veteran enrolled for care with VA, but not currently registered, visit our website at www.myhealth.va.gov or contact the My HealtheVet Coordinator, Joan McWilliams, at 918-577-3824 for more information. ★





13 SMOKING CESSATION TIPS

BY EILEEN LYON, LCSW, SOCIAL WORKER

1

Know Why You Want to Quit

So you want to quit smoking, but do you know why? "Because it's bad for you" isn't good enough. To get motivated, you need a powerful, personal reason to quit.

Maybe you want to protect your family from secondhand smoke. Maybe the thought of lung cancer frightens you. Or maybe you'd like to look and feel younger. Choose a reason that is strong enough to outweigh the urge to light up.

2

Don't Go Cold Turkey

It may be tempting to toss your cigarettes and declare you've quit, plain and simple. But going cold turkey isn't easy to do. About 95% of people who try to stop smoking without therapy or medication end up relapsing.

The reason is that nicotine is addictive. The brain becomes used to having nicotine and craves it. In its absence, the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal occur.

3

Try Nicotine-Replacement Therapy

When you stop smoking, nicotine withdrawal may make you feel frustrated, depressed, restless, or irritable. The craving for "just one drag" may be overwhelming. Nicotine-replacement therapy can help reduce these feelings.

Studies suggest nicotine gum, lozenges and patches can help double your chances of quitting successfully when used with an intensive behavioral program. But using these products while smoking is generally not recommended.

4

Ask About Prescription Pills

To ease nicotine withdrawal without using products that contain nicotine, ask your doctor about prescription medications. There are pills that help reduce cravings by affecting chemicals in the brain.

They may also make smoking less satisfying if you do pick up a cigarette. Other drugs can help reduce troubling withdrawal symptoms, such as depression or inability to concentrate.

5

Don't Go It Alone

Tell your friends, family, and co-workers that you're trying to quit. Their encouragement could make the difference. You may also want to join a support group or talk to a counselor.

Behavioral therapy is a type of counseling that helps you identify and stick to quit-smoking strategies. Combine behavioral therapy with nicotine replacement products and/or medication to boost your odds of success.

6

Manage Stress

One reason people smoke is that the nicotine helps them relax. Once you quit, you'll need another way to cope with stress.

Try getting regular massages, listening to relaxing music, or learning yoga or Tai Chi. If possible, avoid stressful situations during the first few weeks after you stop smoking.

7

Avoid Alcohol, Other Triggers

Certain activities may boost your urge to smoke. Alcohol is one of the most common triggers, so try to drink less when you first quit.

If coffee is a trigger, switch to tea for a few weeks. And if you usually smoke after meals, find something else to do instead, like brushing your teeth or chewing gum.

8

Clean House

Once you've smoked your last cigarette, throw away all of your ashtrays and lighters. Wash any clothes that smell like smoke and clean your carpets, draperies and upholstery.

Use air fresheners to help rid your home of that familiar scent. You don't want to see or smell anything that reminds you of smoking.

9

Try and Try Again

It's very common to have a relapse. Many smokers try several times before giving up cigarettes for good. Examine the emotions and circumstances that may lead to your relapse.

Use it as an opportunity to reaffirm your commitment to quitting. Once you've made the decision to try again, set a "quit date" within the next month.

10

Get Moving

Physical activity can help reduce nicotine cravings and ease some withdrawal symptoms. When you want to reach for a cigarette, put on your inline skates or jogging shoes instead.

Even mild exercise is helpful, such as walking the dog or pulling weeds in the garden. The extra calories you burn will also ward off weight gain as you quit smoking.

11

Eat Fruits and Veggies

Don't try to diet while giving up cigarettes -- too much deprivation is bound to backfire. Instead, focus on eating more fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products.

A Duke University study suggests these foods make cigarettes taste terrible. This gives you a leg up in fighting your cravings while providing disease-fighting nutrients.

12

Choose Your Reward

In addition to the tremendous health benefits, one of the perks of giving up cigarettes is all the money you will save. Reward yourself by spending part of it on something fun.

13

Do It for Your Health

There's more than the monetary reward to consider. Smoking cessation has immediate health benefits. It lowers your blood pressure and reduces your pulse after only 20 minutes.

Within a day, the carbon monoxide level in your blood returns to normal. Within two weeks to three months, your risk of a heart attack decreases and your lungs begin to function better. Long-term benefits include a reduced risk for coronary heart disease, stroke, lung cancer and other cancers.

JCMVAMC is ready to help you quit smoking! Ask your Primary Care Provider for a referral to the Smoking Treatment Program or call Eileen Lyon at 918-610-2000.

Veterans can also call Quit Vet, a toll free telephone quit smoking line, at 1-855-QUIT VET, or log onto SmokefreeVET, a mobile text message smoking cessation service. Visit www.smokefree.gov/VET.

NAVY VETERAN THANKFUL FOR VA CANCER TREATMENT

STORY AND PHOTOS BY NATHAN SCHAEFFER, PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST

In November 2013, Navy Veteran Vane Bell received news that no patient wants to hear.

He had colon cancer, which began with a tumor in his colon and later spread to his liver.

“(I was) scared to death,” said Bell, who lives in Bristow, Okla. “(It hit me) like a ton of bricks. It was really rough. I just thought that was it.”

Bell had surgery at a local hospital in Tulsa to remove part of his colon, and then began chemotherapy treatment at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center in January 2014.

After using tobacco most of his life, VA doctors advised Bell to immediately quit tobacco.

Studies have shown that smoking during chemotherapy treatment can lessen the effectiveness of treatment and can increase the severity of complications from treatment, such as dry mouth or sores, weight loss and fatigue.

“I smoked for a long time,” said Bell, who served in the Navy from 1977 to 1982 aboard the USS Lexington and USS Midway aircraft carriers. “I dipped snuff. When I was diagnosed, I’ve never touched them since.”

For four months, Bell received intravenous chemotherapy



Sherry Smith, a Licensed Practical Nurse, checks Navy Veteran Van Bell's vital signs during an appointment at the Jack. C. Montgomery VA Medical Center.

JCMVAMC ONCOLOGY PROGRAM

The Jack C. Montgomery Oncology Program diagnoses and/or treats approximately 480 new cancer patients each year.

In addition, the Oncology Program monitors the health of approximately 3,000 Veterans who have completed cancer treatment to watch for a recurrence or metastasis.

The program has two oncologists, a nurse practitioner and

three registered nurses on staff. In addition, a social worker, dietician and chaplain also provide services for Veterans.

While receiving treatment in the Chemotherapy/Infusion Clinic, Veterans have access to free Wi-Fi or they can use one of the clinic's three iPads. In addition, the clinic has DVD players and several movies they can watch to help pass the time.

To help with the mental aspects of cancer, the program offers a Relaxation Class. They also hold activities once a week such as Trivial Pursuit and organize special celebrations once a month to lift patient's spirits during their treatment.

treatment in the JCMVAMC Chemotherapy/Infusion Clinic.

“I came in on Monday and I’d be here about eight hours and get my medication,” said Bell.

The treatment at the hospital was followed by 46 hours of chemotherapy treatment at his home.

“I’d be off for a week and then I’d come back and do it again,” he said.

Following intravenous treatment, VA doctors had Bell take oral chemotherapy medication.

In November 2014, Bell traveled to the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston to receive radiofrequency ablation treatment that is designed to heat and destroy cancer cells.

But when VA conducted a Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scan of his colon and liver, doctors could no longer find his tumor.

A year after first being diagnosed, his cancer was now in remission.

“I was always hopeful,” said Bell. “(After) talking with the VA Chaplain and my preacher at church, I turned it over to God and the VA. They got me



in remission. I thank God every day.”

The JCMVAMC Chemotherapy/Infusion Clinic will continue to closely monitor his health to watch out for a return of the cancer.

Bell said he is thankful to VA for the quality of care he has received.

“My experience at this hospital has just been outstanding and great,” said Bell. “The nurses, they’re outstanding. There are good, caring people here. You hear different things people say about the hospital, but I’ve never had a bad experience with the VA at all.” ★

“Every staff member involved with our activities realizes how devastating it can be to be diagnosed with cancer,” said Bonnie Folkerts, JCMVAMC Cancer Program Manager. “We want to help our Veterans and their families by giving them a fun, positive activity even if it’s only for a few moments. The more positive they are, the better their treatment will be. It’s a small way for us to give back to those who gave so much to us.”

Photo on Right: Gulf War Veteran Nicholai Auxer poses for a photo with Chemotherapy/Infusion Clinic staff on March 17. The Chemotherapy/Infusion Clinic celebrated St. Patrick’s Day with their Veteran patients and had decorations, shamrock cookies and cupcakes and green punch.



GERM ZAPPING SUCCESS

STORY BY XENEX DISINFECTION SERVICES MEDIA RELATIONS
PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER BESHEARS, VISUAL INFORMATION SPECIALIST

As Sally, Jasmin, Adolpho, Cecilia and Alphonso – five Xenex Germ-Zapping Robots – emerged from their crates in the fall of 2013 at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center (JCMVAMC), Leon Langguth was reporting to a new position as the Chief of Environmental Management Services (EMS).

Charged with integrating this futuristic room disinfection technology into the hospital, he dove in with energy, curiosity and a healthy dose of skepticism. Could germ-zapping robot technology be integrated into the facility's day-to-day operations?

The answer was and is a resounding “yes.”

In fact, JCMVAMC has been the top Xenex user during the 1st and 2nd quarters of Fiscal year 2015 among more than 36

Robert McAvay (center), an Account Manager with Xenex, Inc., traveled from San Antonio, Texas in May to present the Xenex Top User award to the JCMVAMC Environmental Management Service (EMS) for the 2nd Quarter of FY 2015.



VA Medical Centers nationwide. EMS is now disinfecting approximately 45 rooms per day – which means a germ-free environment for the Veterans it serves.

JCMVAMC invested in Xenex room disinfection robots to battle deadly pathogens and kill multi-drug resistant organisms that put patients at risk. The primary goal of the Xenex system is to increase patient safety by reducing health care associated infections, which are not only dangerous to a patient but also lengthen the patient's stay and cost an average of \$20,000 to \$30,000 to treat.

The Xenex system works by pulsing xenon, an inert gas, at high intensity in an ultraviolet flash lamp. This produces germicidal ultraviolet C (UVC) and is effective against even the most dangerous pathogens, including *Clostridium difficile* (C.

diff), norovirus, influenza and staph bacteria, including methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, better known as MRSA.

JCMVAMC was the first hospital in Eastern Oklahoma to use the Xenex system, which has been credited for helping other health care facilities in the U.S. decrease their MRSA and C.diff infection rates by more than 50 percent.

When the robots arrived, Langguth learned all he could about the technology and asked many questions of the Xenex customer support team.

“They were very responsive,” he said.

Soon after implementation, EMS and their new robots got to work, and Langguth urged the EMS team across all shifts to be proactive and creative.

Collaboration and teamwork has been key to JCMVAMC's infection reduction success. Langguth encouraged feedback not only from the housekeepers, but also from clinical staff.

He worked closely with Cheryl Robbins, JCMVAMC Multi Drug-Resistant Organisms Prevention Coordinator, to educate housekeepers about the importance of their germ-fighting efforts. After a few months of analyzing data and considering employee input, a new robot operating plan was implemented.

To become more efficient, EMS disinfected areas not in use, such as the Surgery Service, bathrooms and waiting rooms, during night shifts. The new plan allowed EMS to disinfect 45 rooms per day as opposed to only 25.

And while the hospital's infection rates were already low, Robbins reports that they have had a 20 percent reduction in MRSA and C.diff infections.

Enthusiasm for the germ-zappers runs high. Nurses request robots to disinfect areas that might need extra attention like the pharmacy, patient rooms or public restrooms.

“Our front office fervently supports this new technology and our strategy,” said Langguth. “The support we've received from the management team has been huge. They are just as excited as we are about what we've been able to accomplish – and we know we have saved the facility a significant amount of money by preventing infections.”

But the best thing about the robots, admits Langguth, is the added protection they provide for Veterans. ★





Joan McWilliams (left), Vice President of the Board of Directors for Haven House, and Greg Sorenson (right), Treasurer and Caretaker of Haven House, pose for a photo with Diane Martin, a Haven House guest.

HAVEN HOUSE OFFERS HOME AWAY FROM HOME

STORY BY TOM CRAMER. PHOTOS BY NATHAN SCHAEFFER

They say home is where the heart is. If that's the case, then home is Haven House —a humble, four-bedroom dwelling tucked away in a quiet neighborhood in Muskogee.

It's where female relatives of Veterans can stay for free while their love one is hospitalized at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center (JCMVAMC).

Momma Bird

"We had one lady who stayed here last year, and she was like a mother to everyone," said Joan McWilliams, Vice President of the Board of Directors for Haven House and a JCMVAMC social worker at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center. "She took care of everybody. She'd go to the grocery store every evening, then come back and cook dinner for all the women. She was sort of like a momma bird."



A bedroom at Haven House.

"A lot of the women who stay here are older," she continued. "Their husbands are in rehab here at the hospital, sometimes for several weeks, so driving back and forth every day to visit would be next to impossible for them. But with Haven House, they can stay a week, two weeks, or as long as they need to. And once they leave, they know they can always come back."



Ed and Diane Martin

It's The Little Things

McWilliams is one of many VA employees at the hospital who regularly volunteer their time to keep the lights on at Haven House, which has been under VA supervision since 1988.

"I stop by about once a week to make sure everything's ok," she explained. "We have a checklist: you want to make sure there's enough toilet paper, that the oven hasn't been left on, that the thermostat is set correctly...little things like that. Things you'd normally do around your own house..."

"We also have two neighbors on either side of the house who keep an eye on the place for us," she added. "They're good neighbors. One of them even brings our trash cans to the curb on trash day."

McWilliams said guests tend to think of Haven House as more than just a place to sleep.

"Before they leave, the women usually do all the dishes, wash their bed sheets and remake their beds, and clean the place up," she said. "This really isn't just a place to spend the night. It's more like a home, and people treat it like a home."

Of Pets and Men

"It's a nice little house, less than a mile away from the hospital," said Diane Martin, whose husband Ed is in rehab at the medical center after suffering a stroke. "Haven House is the perfect name for it. No pets. No children. No men. It's perfect. "I feel safe here."

Martin lives in Poteau, which is not exactly a stone's throw away from Muskogee. So a daily drive there to visit Ed would have been a strain, to say the least.

"I live over 80 miles away and I could not bear the thought of leaving him," she said. "If it hadn't been for Haven House, I don't know what I would have done."

"Ed's improving by leaps and bounds, and I think it's because I've been here with him every day. We've been married 37 years. Me being here has really helped him a lot; it's been a big encouragement for him."

Focus, Focus, Focus

"I didn't have to worry, knowing Diane was at Haven House," said Ed, who is 72. "I didn't have to worry about her staying someplace not so desirable. I'm glad she could be here with me, because she was a big influence on my rehabilitation."

"I wouldn't have been able to do this if it weren't for Haven House," his wife said. "I wouldn't have been able to afford a motel for a week. This is a blessing."

But of course, nothing's perfect.

"They have a big screen TV," she said, "and a nice washer and dryer. It would be nice if they had internet access, but I don't want to be greedy."

Greg Sorenson, Haven House Treasurer and chief of the Engineering Service at the medical center, said Haven House offers a pleasant retreat where guests can enjoy some peace and quiet—or a bit of companionship—depending on their mood.

"It's nice to have a quiet house to rest up in," he said. "But you can also have camaraderie, if you want."

Haven House usually has about five women staying there at any one time, so there's plenty of opportunity for social interaction. "They can talk, share stories, comfort one another," Sorenson said. "They're all going through a difficult time."



Ed Martin undergoes rehabilitation in the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit.

Most guests stay for two or three days, but there are always exceptions.

“We had one lady last year who was practically homeless,” Sorenson said. “She was about three weeks away from moving into an apartment, and needed a place to stay. Her only other option would have been to stay at the homeless shelter for three weeks.

“I wouldn’t have been able to do this if it weren’t for Haven House. I wouldn’t have been able to afford a motel for a week. This is a blessing.”

“So of course, we let her stay. She was very appreciative. She cleaned the whole house for us, from top to bottom. She even did some caulking in the bathrooms. We didn’t ask her to; she just did it. She was very handy.

Can I Use Your Shower?

“We had another woman who didn’t actually need a room for the night, she just wanted to use our shower,” he said. “She said her husband was undergoing chemotherapy at the hospital. Home was a long ways away, so she just needed a place where she could clean up a bit.”

Sorenson said Haven House gets a lot of help from the good citizens of Muskogee, as well as nearby communities. “This is like our mini Fisher House, so looking after this place is a community affair,” he observed. “People here take a lot of pride in it.”

And just about everybody pitches in.

“The Eagle Scouts built us a handicap ramp out front,” Sorenson said. “They also painted two bedrooms for us. The Muskogee Lion’s Club painted the outside of the house for us. Youth volunteers from the First Baptist Church replaced all of our ceiling tiles and did some painting. Folks from the Bank of Oklahoma trimmed our bushes. And when we had that really bad ice storm in 2007, people came over and shoveled our walkway.”

And the community’s affection for Haven House only seems to keep growing.

Home Economics 101

“The American Legion Auxiliary out of Eufaula donated a dryer through Lowe’s of Muskogee,” Sorenson said. The American Legion Auxiliary out of Sand Springs gave us a microwave. The First United Methodist Church Ladies Group gave us furniture. The Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary in Eufaula donates food items.”

The list of Haven House benefactors goes on and on. Sorenson said his wife, Debbie, also likes to lend a helping hand.

“Debbie checks the food pantry to make sure none of the items in there have exceeded their expiration date,” he explained. “Debbie’s very organized. You can tell she was a Home Economics major.”

Sorenson said Haven House also receives monetary donations from the community, which he uses to keep the house in good repair and to buy important household items.

“We needed a new toaster recently,” he said. “So I bought one. As you might imagine, the toaster gets a lot of use. You’ve got to have a working toaster.”

If you would like to make a donation to Haven House, call Greg Sorenson at 918-577-3682 ★



NEED TO LOSE A FEW POUNDS? GET STARTED WITH VA'S MOVE! PROGRAM

If you are carrying extra weight, losing weight and keeping it off can be one of the best things you can do to protect your health. Excess weight puts you at risk for problems like heart disease, diabetes, some cancers, sleep apnea and gallstones. The best way to manage your weight is to eat wisely and be as physically active as possible.

VA offers the MOVE! Program, a self-management weight program for Veterans who want to improve their health.

Class information and times are listed below. To learn more, contact our MOVE!/Nutrition Office at 918-577-3214.

MOVE! Introduction Class

Muskogee: Wednesdays at 1 p.m. in the MOVE!/Nutrition office, located on the 2nd floor at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center

Tulsa: Thursdays at 1 p.m. in the Boomer/Sooner Room at the Ernest Childers VA Outpatient Clinic

MOVE! Group Class

A 16-week program that helps Veterans learn how to improve their eating, exercise and behavior habits

Muskogee: Wednesdays at 10 a.m. in the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center auditorium

Tulsa: Tuesdays at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. in the Boomer/Sooner Room at the Ernest Childers VA Outpatient Clinic

MOVE! Support Group

Our MOVE! Support Group is offered to Veterans who have completed the MOVE! Group Class. Receive support from other Veterans who have participated in the program.

Muskogee: Fourth Wednesday of the month at 2 p.m. at the JCM East Clinic. Veterans at the Hartshorne VA Outpatient Clinic can also attend via our video teleconferencing system.

Tulsa: Fourth Thursday of the month at 2 p.m. at the Ernest Childers VA Outpatient Clinic. Veterans at the Vinita VA Outpatient Clinic can also attend via our video teleconferencing system.



“A VERY GOOD LIFE”

BY NATHAN SCHAEFFER, PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST

Just a few weeks after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, 23-year-old Ira Boss received a draft notice from the U.S. Army.

“They sent you a notice in the mail,” said Boss, who is now 95 years old and receives his health care through the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center. “I was expecting it, because there were some who had already got them.”

At the time, Boss worked on his father’s farm in Wainwright, Okla. where he milked cows, raised cattle and grew corn, oats, wheat and cotton.

Since he was an only son, Boss could have opted out of military service and remained home to work on the farm. But he decided to instead serve his country.

“I decided I’d rather stay in then get out and have to go over again” said Boss.

On Jan. 10, 1942, Boss was formally inducted into the Army at Fort Sill, Okla. and sent to Camp Wallace, Texas for basic training.

Given the choice between serving in the infantry or an artillery unit, Boss chose artillery and was sent to Fort Bliss, Texas for further training.

Next, Boss was sent to New York City where he was supposed to board a troop ship and head off to combat overseas.

“When we loaded the troop train in El Paso (Texas) at Fort Bliss, we were headed overseas,” said Boss. “They sidetracked our train and we wound up (staying) in New York City.”

The Army needed anti-aircraft battalions to protect New York City from enemy planes, so Boss’ battalion was reassigned to the 604 Coast Artillery Battalion, Battery B, one of four batteries around the city.

“Each battery had 90 mm guns,” said Boss. “We went into New Jersey. When we unloaded, we pulled out into a swamp. The mosquitos, they were bad. We were there for about three months before we ever started building our own barracks.”



A photo of Ira Boss in 1942.

Enduring Love

While Ira fulfilled his military obligation, Melba, his high school sweetheart, remained behind in Wainwright. The couple began dating in 1937 when he was a junior and she was a sophomore.

“We met at school,” said Melba. “Our mothers knew each other. Of course at Wainwright, everyone knew everyone because it was a small town. I just liked him. We just enjoyed each other.”

After Ira received his draft notice from the Army, the couple decided to postpone their plan to get married.

When Ira was granted a furlough while stationed in New York City, the couple decided the time was right and

got married on Dec. 15, 1942 in Muskogee.

In May 1942, Ira convinced Melba to move to New York City, which meant traveling outside of Oklahoma for the first time.

"After we got married, he wanted me to come to New York City," said Melba. "My cousin said, 'you can ride with us to Chicago and catch a train.' Well, I had been no further than Muskogee. He met me at Grand Central Station when I got there."

"How I ever got the nerve to go, I will never know," said Melba with a laugh. "I was in love."

After a few short months in New York City, Melba had to return home to Wainwright when the Army sent Ira to Mechanic School at Fort Sill, Okla.

"I went back to Wainwright and stayed with my mother," said Melba. "Then I had a baby. Chuck was born in 1944. I had cousins who lived there, so we had family to support us."

Following Army Mechanic School, Ira received orders to report to the 942nd Field Artillery Battalion, which was stationed in North Carolina. But he wasn't there long.

"They were packed and ready to take off for France," said Boss.

In January 1945, the battalion landed at Le Havre, France.

"It was a long trip," said Boss. "When we got there, a lot of our equipment was sunk. It got hit by torpedoes and we had to wait on equipment. When we moved to Camp Chesterfield, there was snow on the ground and we were in six-man tents."

Boss and his battalion moved across France and crossed the Rhine River into Germany to provide artillery fire for the Allies.

"We were following up where troops had already been through," said Boss. "We were kind of a clean-up crew."

Shortly after the 942nd Field Artillery Battalion crossed into Germany, the Germans surrendered on May 8, 1945. With Europe now in peace, troops with the most combat time were sent home.

Boss and his battalion were ordered to stay and serve as a security force in newly occupied Germany.

"After the Germans surrendered, we were kind of a police force," said Boss. "We would go out, mostly at night, around these little towns to see if everything was alright."

In December 1945, Boss returned to the U.S. and was discharged from the Army on Dec. 10, 1945.

Our Muskogee Home

After the war, Ira searched for work and finally found a job working at a lumber yard.

"Only job I could find when I came home," said Boss.

With a steady income, the couple decided to purchase a home in 1947 and make Muskogee their permanent home.

"Muskogee was the closest town from Wainwright and we felt like we wanted to come here so he could find a job," said Melba, who is 93-years-old. "We decided we wanted to buy us a little home, so that's what we did."

Through the years, Ira worked for three different lumber companies, an appliance store and furniture store, while Melba stayed home to raise their children.

"My mother was a widow and she had five children, so I knew that I couldn't go to college," said Melba. "But I wanted to get married, have a home and children. I didn't really care about working (outside the home)."

Today, the couple has been married for 73 years, have five grandchildren and still live in Muskogee.

"We still live in the same home we bought after he came back from the war," said Melba. "A very good life." ★



A photo of Ira Boss in 1942 in New Jersey.

“HEART STRINGS”

CONCERT SERIES TO CONTINUE IN 2015

STORY AND PHOTOS BY NATHAN SCHAEFFER, PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST

During 2015, members of the Tulsa Symphony Orchestra will continue to visit the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center once a month and perform soothing music for patients, thanks to the generosity of T.D. Williamson, Inc.

The company initially sponsored the “Heart Strings” concert series from October 2013 to December 2014, and decided to renew for an additional year.

“We support a lot of Veteran activities and this is just an extension of that,”

said Carla Cole, Community Relations Director for T.D. Williamson, Inc. “We definitely want to support our Veterans. It’s the least we can do for the sacrifices that they made.”

On March 18, Lorelei Barton and Lise Glaser, a harpist and oboist with the Tulsa Symphony, performed music for patients in the Canteen and 5 West Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit.

Since St. Patrick’s Day was March 17, the duo played Irish and Welsh music, along with popular American songs from the 1960s.

Barton, who has performed with the symphony for nine seasons, said it’s important to play music patients can identify with.

“I think familiar songs are very important to those who are not feeling well,” said Barton. “If it’s something they can relate to, it takes their mind off of what they’re dealing with at the time. That’s important to us.”

Barton said music has been proven to help the healing process.

Lorelei Barton and Lise Glaser (right), a harpist and oboist with the Tulsa Symphony, perform music for Veterans.



“It’s a proven scientific medical fact that the harp does lower the heart rate,” she said. “As the old adage says, ‘music is food for the soul.’”

Vietnam Veteran Forrest Pearish, who was receiving Inpatient Rehabilitation treatment, got the opportunity to listen while he ate lunch and said the music was very therapeutic.

“It relaxes you,” he said. “It does cheer you up and make you feel good. I liked it.”

Army Veteran David Morse, who was also receiving Inpatient Rehabilitation treatment, wanted to thank the musicians for visiting 5 West.

“I think it’s real cool that they would take time out of their day to come visit with some Veterans and brighten my day up a little bit,” said Morse. “I really appreciate it.” ★



Lorelei Barton, a harpist with the Tulsa Symphony, performs music for Veterans.

WOODWORKING IS CREATIVE OUTLET FOR RETIRED VETERAN

STORY AND PHOTO BY NATHAN SCHAEFFER, PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST

When Army Veteran John Bixby retired nine years ago at the age of 55, he enjoyed the fruits of his labor for a while, but quickly grew bored.

"It takes about a month to wipe out the honey do list," said Bixby, who lives in Eufaula, Okla. "You can only play so much golf and sail so much. I needed something to do."

He started a real estate company and remodeled homes for several years.

"I went back to work and started buying Victorian homes and flipping them," said Bixby. "That was kind of a creative outlet."

When he retired for a second time, he turned to woodworking to fill his time. Almost every day, Bixby spends time in the woodworking shop at his home where he creates wooden artwork such as bowls, platters, utensils, plates and pens.

He said he enjoys the challenge of taking a raw piece of wood and turning it into a finished piece of art.



Army Veteran John Bixby displays his entry in the 2015 Veterans Creative Arts Competition.

"What I like is that I start with just a square piece of wood," he said. "Somewhere in there is a bowl or a vessel. You just have to find it. When you're done, you've created something from just a blank piece of wood and it's pretty fulfilling."

Along with giving him a creative outlet, art helps Bixby cope with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). From 1968 to 1969, he served in combat in Vietnam with the 101st Airborne Division.

"It's a good way to release stuff," said Bixby. "It's therapeutic. I get down in my shop by myself. It just fills my day and gives me a lot to do. I just really enjoy it. It's fun. It's creative."

Since Bixby also receives his health care through the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center, he decided to enter his artwork in the annual Veterans Creative Arts Competition, which was held Feb. 2-3 at the hospital.

The competition is held at VA facilities nationwide and includes more than 150 art, music, dance, drama and creative writing entries.

A national selection committee chooses first, second and third place winners among all of the entries. Select winners will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, which will be held Oct. 12-19, 2015 at the Durham VA Medical Center in Durham, N.C.

Bixby, who is competing in the competition for the second year, hopes to be selected for the festival so he can display it on a national venue.

"I'd love to see my art on a national level," said Bixby. "That would be pretty cool."

In the meantime, his artwork can be viewed and even purchased here in Oklahoma at the SOFA Art Gallery in McAlester and Our Favorite Place, an art gallery in Eufaula which sells "Made in Oklahoma" items.

2016 Veterans Creative Arts Competition

To learn how you can compete in the 2016 Veteran Creative Arts Competition, contact Deborah Moreno at 918-577-4014 or visit www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov. ★

JCMVAMC HOSTS FIRST TRIBAL RELATIONS WORKSHOP

STORY BY NATHAN SCHAEFFER, PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST | PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER BESHEARS, VISUAL INFORMATION SPECIALIST

Since July 2012, the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center (JCMVAMC) has signed tribal reimbursement agreements with 28 tribal facilities and four Indian Health Service facilities in Eastern Oklahoma, as part of an initiative to increase access to health care for Native American Veterans.

Through funding from the VA Office of Rural Health, JCMVAMC will reimburse tribes when Native American Veterans, who are enrolled for VA health care, receive health care at their facilities. As a result of the reimbursement agreements, JCMVAMC has paid more than \$1.9 million to tribes from July 2012 to January 2015.

The agreements also allow VA and tribes to coordinate care by sharing patient information.

In an effort to further develop partnerships, JCMVAMC hosted its first-ever Tribal Relations Workshop on March 10, which was attended by 19 tribal representatives.

The workshop provided an opportunity for VA to discuss recent amendments to the reimbursement agreements, share information about VA programs and services for rural Veterans such as the Veteran Choice Program and Telehealth, and for VA and the tribes to share information. “We have reimbursement agreements with all but one tribal entity in Eastern Oklahoma,” said James Floyd, JCMVAMC

Director. “So we want to start having at least annual meetings with them to talk about how things are working. We want them to know who we are and how we can help them if they have questions.”

John Alley, JCMVAMC Indian Health Liaison, said one of the most important outcomes of the workshop was the opportunity to share information.

“We want to determine if there’s anything we can improve or do differently to make the agreements better,” said Alley. “We had a question and answer session and we were able to answer many questions. For the ones we didn’t answer today, we will follow up with them.”

Amy Eden, Revenue Cycle Manager for the Muscogee Creek Nation Department of Health, attended the workshop and said she learned valuable information not only from VA but from other tribal representatives.

“I think it’s an excellent opportunity for all of the tribes to collaborate with one another and the VA on providing better health care for our Veterans,” said Eden. “I really enjoy working with the tribal liaisons here at the VA. They’ve been exceptional to work with. They’re so kind and it’s like working with people we’ve known for a long time. It’s very good.” ★



COMBAT PATCHES SOUGHT FOR MILITARY DISPLAY

Did you serve in Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom?

The Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center invites OEF/OIF/OND Combat Care Team invites Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans to donate their combat patches for upcoming military displays at the medical center, its outpatient clinics and the Tulsa Vet Center.

The displays will be unveiled prior to Veterans Day and are intended to be a tribute to the service and sacrifice of our Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans.

Patches should be subdued and need to be received by October 16, 2015.

Along with the patch, please include the Veteran's name, rank, branch of service, years of deployment(s) and combat theater (Iraq or Afghanistan). Family members can also submit a patch for their loved one.

Patches will not be returned. If would like to participate, donate in person or via mail to:

Louis Gibson, OEF/OIF/OND Transitional Patient Advocate
Room 4A-103
Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center
1011 Honor Heights Drive
Muskogee, OK 74401

Please contact Gibson at 918-577-3196 for questions. ★





U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

1 CONVERSATION

can open the door to support.



  **Veterans
Crisis Line**
1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**

• • • Confidential chat at **VeteransCrisisLine.net** or text to **838255** • • •

The Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center and Hartshorne, Tulsa and Vinita VA Outpatient Clinics served approximately 37,700 Veterans from a 25-county area in Eastern Oklahoma in 2014.



Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center (Muskogee)
918-577-3000 or toll free at 1-888-397-8387



Jack C. Montgomery East (Muskogee)
918-577-3699



Behavioral Medicine Clinic (Tulsa)
918-610-2000



Ernest Childers VA Outpatient Clinic (Tulsa)
918-628-2500
or toll free at 1-888-398-8387



Hartshorne VA Outpatient Clinic
888-878-1598



Vinita VA Outpatient Clinic
918-713-5400

The Price of Freedom is Visible Here



VA
HEALTH CARE | Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century